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Helen Kara. *Creative Research Methods in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2015. 221 pp. ISBN 978-1-4473-1626-8 (hbk) £65.00, 978-1-4473-1627-5 (pbk) £23.99.

Helen Kara begins her text by recognising that all research is essentially creative. Scholars create something that did not hitherto exist and, further, cordon off a small territory of scholarship in which to plant an original contribution.

But Kara has a different kind of creativity in mind for her guide. Once you have your creative idea, how do you go about researching it? Scholars can take any number of conventional paths, but Kara urges them to push their thinking so as to enrich and extend that which is known. Whilst avoiding a red-letter definition of creativity in research, she notes some of its defining features: a spirit of play, a resistance to binary thinking, a tendency to straddle boundaries.

Kara endorses the use of novel, experimental methods and methodologies, but she sounds the note throughout that methodological experimentation for its own sake is insufficient and inadvisable. She insists that scholars start with a research question; she then encourages them to think broadly about what methods might answer that question.

Her book is, therefore, a companion. She does not lay out an exhaustive, pedagogical, rigorously detailed programme for research design and conduct. Textbooks that offer such structure are plentiful, and she frequently cites Alan Bryman, Martyn Hammersley, and Jennifer Mason among others, directing readers to basic qualitative research methods. Her purpose is to expose readers to examples of scholars who have innovated within broad categories such as ethnography or more narrowed ones such as participatory action research.

Thus, her book is also a compendium. Examples of creative research are sketched out, alluded to in a few sentences, or at most highlighted within a shaded grey box. Never do these run even the length of a page, and given the novel and sometimes contested nature of these methods, Kara's sketches are not sufficient to instruct readers on how to make use of these methods. Readers should treat these as suggestions, noting interesting examples and following the references to find the study in question and learn how the methods were conceived and applied. Kara offers several online resources – largely but not exclusively links videos – to connect readers with examples, and these are noted with an icon in the text's margin.

Kara's book is not, however, a critique: she does not evaluate the creative methods she presents. I can understand her decision – experimental methods are contested within the academy, and Kara might not wish to provide a stick to beat scholars who push the boundaries of the field when her overall purpose is to support them. We get some sense of Kara's own limits in her interrogation of Karen Barbour's research, which fuses dance, photography, autoethnography, and analytical assessment; though she has 'a great deal of respect for Barbour's attempts to span this enormous gulf' (p. 152) between different methodologies, she finds the result unsuccessful. More evaluation of this type would be welcome. Scholars must understand the implications of adopting creative and experimental methods. Doctoral students, for example, will have to answer for their work in their examination, and later scholars need the support of grant agencies to carry out their projects. A clear assessment of how creative methods are received and challenged would be a responsible inclusion – not to deter but to inform.

Although this book is not a stand-alone textbook for research design, Kara arranges her book in the typical way, beginning with the development of research questions (and a strong emphasis on ethical considerations) and continuing through fieldwork and analysis – even a memorable example of creativity in recruiting a sample (p. 9). The inclusion, however, of her later chapters on writing, presentation, and dissemination, surprised me. Kara notes 'that few books on research methods give

advice on how to write' (p. 126), and whilst the subject of these chapters encompasses what one *does* with research, the material seemed to me an awkward fit in a text on research methods. Scholars can indeed be creative in these endeavours, and it may be pedantic to cleave the book in two or tinker with the title so it encompasses creativity in the research *process*. These chapters do prod researchers to consider delivery and audience in new ways, much as her earlier chapters encourage them to find novel means of answering questions. These chapters also continue her emphasis on ethics, including the salutary note on the necessity of presenting 'enough information to enable audiences to judge research for themselves.' (p. 141) If this tilts creative research too much to description, the chapter on analysing data balances this out.

Altogether, Kara presents a useful prompt for researchers to infuse creativity into the already creative act of research.

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